E 448
.W55

WHAT SHALL BE DONE?

WHAT is the present status of the free people of color in our several States? Great changes have occurred, especially within the last few years; and, however much their general condition may be ameliorated, there is a constant tendency to oppress and to withdraw the privileges heretofore accorded.

The North generally not only refuse to this population a fundamental right of freemen, that of voting for their rulers, but are imposing restrictions and disabilities which have been justly termed "repugnant to law, justice, religion and humanity." The new sovereignties of the West have surpassed the older ones in these particulars. Indiana, Oregon, Kansas, and perhaps others, either prohibit these people from acquiring and holding property, or forbid their residence by penalties.

During the past winter movements were made showing a rapidly growing tendency to prevent colored emigration into Northern States. In the New York Legislature a petition for such a prohibition has been presented. A similar petition has been introduced in the Legislature of New Jersey. Bills to this effect have been brought into the Legislatures of Pennsylvania and Iowa. The Constitutional Convention of Illinois, has adopted an article in their revised form of Constitution forbidding negroes and mulattoes to come into the State. The Constitutional Convention of the proposed State of Kanawha has adopted an article of like purport. The standing Committee on Federal Relations in the Ohio House of Representatives, to which was referred sundry petitions asking for the enactment of laws requiring negroes or colored persons to be removed from the State, and the prohibition of

E449
.W6

such people from immigration to or settling within the State, made a report that they have given the subject their most careful consideration, with a desire to give practical effect to the wishes of many of the citizens of the State, from almost every section, and coming from all classes and parties. In this document occurs the following language :—

"The negro race is looked upon by the people of Ohio as a class to be kept by themselves ; to be debarred of social intercourse with the whites ; to be deprived of all advantages which they cannot enjoy in common with their own class. They have always been deprived of the elective franchise in this State ; and no party among our citizens has ever contemplated that they should be given that right of citizenship ; and, for ought that appears to the contrary, the colored man in Ohio will not, in all future time that he may remain an inhabitant of the State, attain any material improvement in the social or political rights over what he now enjoys."

Senator Browning of Illinois, a gentleman of finely balanced mind and great moderation of character, in a speech advocating the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, is reported to have said :

"We owe something to these people more than simply to strike from them the fetters of bondage that now hold them, and turn them loose among us, with scarcely the means or the ability of providing the most ordinary necessities of life, much less with the means of any advance in the exaltation of character and in the attainment of a position in society. They never can do that. The laws of many of the States, and of my own State, are rigid against the admission of a free negro population into our communities. Indeed, most of the States are closed by legal enactments, by statutes enacted by their Legislatures, against the admission of this class of people. They are hunted from State to State. They are driven from the Slave States when they are manumitted, and in many of the slave States they have been proposing for years to recapture and reduce the free negroes among them again to slavery, or to drive them from the State. They can be permitted to remain in some of them only on the condition of being again reduced to slavery ; and when they are driven from the slave States, where are they to go ? Most of the free States are closed against them. They are hunted from State to State as the

wild beasts of the forest. Persecuted by the people of the slave States, until they are compelled to leave there, and persecuted by the people of the free States until they are compelled to leave there, where are the poor, miserable creatures to go? Where are they to find shelter or an asylum? They can do it nowhere in our country without a change in our policy; and they can do it nowhere outside of our country without pecuniary aid from us."

These are cruel measures, and this oppressive legislation appears in great rapidity. They cannot be the result of party feelings, as they emanate from regions and persons of different political bias. They are caused mainly by the silent working of the law of races, quickened by the pressure of a redundant population, and the fact that the arable lands of the United States are mostly already taken up. These repellant forces must continue to swell as the white population grows from the thirty millions of to-day to one hundred millions in 1900, and two hundred millions in 1930, according to the ratio of decimal increase!

While this popular feeling may be looked upon as inexpedient, unrepublican and oppressive, yet its existence and exercise proves that this population have no encouragement to regard this country as a permanent residence. Our duty under these circumstances is an obvious one. It is to make Africa the point to which we should especially encourage emigration. It is the land most natural to the colored race, and where they may be instrumental in doing much good. It is the land most exclusively their own; where caste will be least unfavorable and where nature has erected the most absolute and insurmountable barrier against any molestation; and where their manhood has by far the best opportunities for development.

Let no one be staggered by want of faith in the practicability of the settlement of our colored population in Liberia —not much more distant than we are from Europe. It is not to be done in a year. Such operations are not in the order of God's providence. In the meanwhile encourage their

gradual emigration; establish commercial relations with Liberia; build up thus the means of cheap intercommunication, and let the colored race here see that while it is under the law of caste, that there they are men, and their manhood universally acknowledged. The consequence seems certain that there will be an exodus gradually increasing with the facilities, until, perhaps, the world may see a repetition of that produced by the famine in Ireland of a dozen years ago. But even if this shall never be realized, at least a large emigration may take place, conveying our language, arts, civilization and religion to the millions of that continent, and contributing to one of the greatest blessings in the history of the world—in one sense even greater than that produced by the emigration hither, because not accompanied by the extinction of the aborigines inhabiting the land.

The presence of the colored people in this country, involves questions of fearful import. Let them be carefully considered, as affecting not only their best interests, but our own. Their colonization anywhere on this continent is but to protract and aggravate the strife. Nowhere outside of their ancestral land are they provided a home, a genial government and nationality. President Benson, in his Inaugural Address, made at Monrovia last January, declares the existence in Liberia and its vicinity, of "a vast region of millions of acres of land, as fertile and as desirable and suitable for the habitation of our race as any other on earth—a country of unsurpassed natural resources, of wealth, remaining yet undeveloped; inhabited to a great extent by a somewhat intelligent, industrious native population, ready to receive, and actually soliciting the introduction and inculcation of civilization, and, to an extent, Christianity among them." This prosperous Republic is providing for exigencies among us constantly becoming more momentous, and it should receive the prompt and hearty support of our entire population.

W. F. GEDDES, PRINTER, 320 CHESTNUT ST., PHILADELPHIA.

54 W

WERT
BOOKBINDING
Grantville Pa
Jan - Feb 1988